

26<sup>th</sup> July 2020 – St Mary Magdalene Patronal Festival

My story today starts with this key and a 3 year old little boy.



My 3 Godchildren had a fascination for this huge key which we believed to be the key to the old lock of St Mary Magdalene's church. On returning to school in September Tim borrowed it for a class show and tell. A few weeks later I picked the children up from home and having navigated the narrow twists and turns of Crimble Clough at teatime I became aware that Matthew, the 3 year old, was talking about a key that belonged to Mary. On the safety of wider roads on Scapegoat Hill I asked, "Who is Mary and why has Matthew got her key". Ever willing to fill in the gaps, one of his siblings replied, "He means St Marys church key" and the penny dropped.

As is the adult way when a child does something which is cute, we joined him in his talk, which did nothing to bring an end to him referring to church as Marys. At Harvest supper he asked if he was going to Marys for tea and would regularly ask if he was going to Marys to play – or Sunday school in our talk. Winter turned to spring, through Lent and onto Easter and we were still referring to church as 'Marys'.

Now when we think of a saint we automatically think of a person being something special with super powers to face the challenges before them, in reality it is just a normal human being, who lived a human life but is, usually after death, acknowledged as having an exceptional degree of holiness or closeness to God.

For me, during that holy week, as I listened to the events of Easter unfold day by day, those innocent words of a child, stripped Mary Magdalene of her Saint hood and I began to see her as an ordinary woman, maybe not much older than I was at the time.

I found myself putting myself in her shoes and questioning what it would be like to be there.

Would I have known what was going on in the upper room at the last supper, would I have seen Judas's betrayal coming. Would I have worried where Jesus, my friend, was on Maundy Thursday not knowing what he would have to face on the Friday?

How would I have felt about His biased trial and the humiliation and flogging that followed.

Could I bear to watch as those nails were hammered into His hands on the cross, could I hear His shouts of pain? Was I in the crowd as He dragged his cross through the streets to Calvary? Would I have been frightened if those around me knew I was a follower of Jesus? How would I have coped with all that went on around the foot of that cross and the horror of watching, as my dear friend took his last breath?

What would I have done on the Saturday when Jewish law forbid me to do anything, when all I could do was prepare the spices to take to His tomb early on Sunday morning, planning with the other women to get there early, under the cover of dark so not to be seen.

What sheer joy would I have felt to experience Jesus, my dear friend, alive and out of the tomb? Would anyone believe us when we told them? What would my life be like afterwards?

That 3 year old is now a strapping 6ft 21 year old, and for without whom we would not have been able to do all the technical things we have done these past 4 months and I am pretty sure, until now, he is unaware of this episode in his life.

Yet those innocent words of a small child brought for me the Easter story to life then, and it still does today and a realisation that she was just an ordinary woman living through what must have been a life changing time for her.

As you read the story retold in our Gospel today, put yourself in Mary Magdalene's shoes as for a short moment you step into her world.



### Collect for the day

Almighty God, whose son restored Mary Magdalene to health of mind and body and called her to be a witness to his resurrection: forgive our sins and heal us by your grace, that we may serve you in power of His risen life; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

### Reading from Psalm 42

As the deer longs for the water-brooks  
So longs my soul for you, O God  
My soul is a thirst for God, a thirst for the living God;  
When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?  
My tears have been my food day and night,  
While all day long they say to me, 'Where now is your God?'  
I pour out my soul when I think on these things:  
How I went with the multitude and led them into the house of God,  
With the voice of praise and thanksgiving,  
Among those who keep holy-day.  
Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?  
And why are you so disquieted within me?  
Put your trust in God;  
For I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and  
my God

## A reading from the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of Paul to the Corinthians

<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

## A reading from the Gospel according to John

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Words from Fr Rodney

We come this Sunday to join together in the celebration of our own St. Mary Magdalene. Karen always says that she's heard so many sermons about Mary Magdalene there can't be much else to say. But there always is because changing circumstances always draw out something different to reflect on, and Mary Magdalene is no exception. It must have been hard for Mary Magdalene to find a place amongst the apostles in a world that believed that women had nothing useful to say or contribute except that of bearing children and caring for the family. But it is quite clear from the gospel story that she was given a significant place, not least in being "the apostle to the apostles", entrusted by Jesus with the good news that He had risen and that she had seen Him. In our reading today from the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians we read "He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for them."

After Jesus ascended, like all who experience losing a loved family member or friend, Mary Magdalene must have felt a huge loss in her life. She must have faced a period of adjustment whilst searching for a new normal in her life. 4 months ago we had our 'normal' taken away from us when the doors of St Mary Magdalene closed. Over the past 16 weeks, through Zoom we have found a way to cope with our loss. We have been able to come together to worship our Lord Sunday by Sunday as we have adjusted to a new way of life but without the spiritual 'food' of the Eucharist. Like Mary we are nearing the time when we need to face our new normal. Returning to church will not be as it was before due to the health and safety restrictions, and some of you I know will be anxious and fearful for a variety of reasons but just as Mary shared the rebuilding of her life together with the apostles, we need to find the support of each other as we start to rebuild our new 'normal' back in the life of the church building.

In the words of Paul, 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!'

Let us pray

As we come together with Mary Magdalene and all the holy women she represents, let us praise God and bring before him our thanks not only for the gifts of the past week, but also for the love and fellowship we have shared at St Mary's over the years. Whilst doing this, we also give thanks for the opportunities we have had to share that same love and fellowship with other faith communities in the last few months and pray that we continue this in the future. Today we also pray for your guidance for all those making plans to open places of worship, particularly in our own parishes and your blessings on their efforts to move us forward safely. Amen

Today we think about all those areas of the world and our own country in need of the kind of love, service and forgiveness reflected in the life of Mary Magdalene. We think of all those who suffer from poverty, disease and violence and the women and children who so often bear the worst of it. We pray that the leaders of the world begin to work in unity to address these issues and that our relationships with one another are guided by kindness and compassion, to bring hope and healing rather than hatred and fear. Amen

As we remember that we are all part of the family of God and loved unconditionally, we pray for all our friends at St Mary Magdalene we have not been able to see over the past 4 months. We also pray today for our own families, friends and neighbours and. We give thanks for the love, friendship and sacrifices that have helped us to sustain the relationships that matter to us, particularly through the difficult times we have all experienced over the last few months. We pray particularly for all those families and communities in need of healing and forgiveness and we continue to pray for all those key workers helping and supporting us at this time. Amen

Today we bring before you those who are sick and in need. We especially pray for those suffering in the pandemic, those who are vulnerable, lonely, anxious or fearful and anyone we especially wish to pray for today.. We ask that they be given the support and the resources they need and find comfort and peace in your love. We give thanks for all those who care for them and pray that they are able to do so safely and ask for your blessings on the efforts of all those working on vaccines and treatments. Amen

Finally we bring before God those who have gone before us, especially all those who have worshiped in St Mary Magdalene's and are no longer with us. We also pray for any known to us that we wish to remember today. We thank you for their lives, their friendship, love and support and the many memories we have of them and we ask that they rest in peace and rise in glory.

*In a moment of silence bring your own prayers to God*

The Lords prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.